

## **Hunter Recruitment and Retention**

Deer hunting is the primary tool that MDC utilizes to manage deer populations. Therefore, hunters are critical to ensuring the long-term ability to manage the deer population at socially and biologically acceptable levels. As a result, hunting season structure and regulations must be designed to achieve the deer population goals and promote hunter participation, recruitment, retention and satisfaction.

The Department supports youth seasons and an apprentice hunting program based on our commitment to hunter recruitment and retention. Through youth seasons, the Department is working to get young hunters in the woods when the chance of success is optimal, to engage them in hunting and the outdoors at an early age. Many states are experiencing extreme declines in hunting participation, making it more difficult to instill the importance of natural resources and relevance of hunting. Missouri is not among those states, and that is largely due to our efforts to reach new youth and adult hunters and provide them with exciting opportunities, like youth portions of hunting season and the apprentice hunting program.

Successful recruitment efforts are evident in the changing age distribution and number of deer hunters (Figure 1 and 2). In 2001, 435,000 individuals held some form of deer hunting permit in Missouri. That number has grown to more than 513,000 individuals during the 2013 deer hunting season. Additionally, hunting is becoming more of a whole family experience as the number of women hunters increased from 39,000 in 2001 to 81,000 in 2013. Increasing hunter numbers are likely the result of increasing opportunities and high success rates that result from a strong growing deer herd. Youth hunter recruitment efforts have been successful in increasing the number of hunters under the age of 16 by more than 40% from 2001 to 2013.

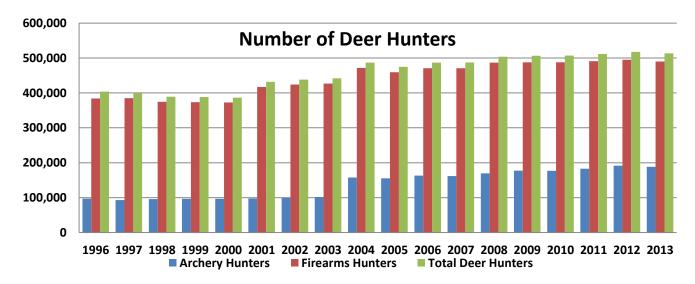


Figure 1. Change in the number archery, firearms and total deer hunters in Missouri from 1996 to 2013.

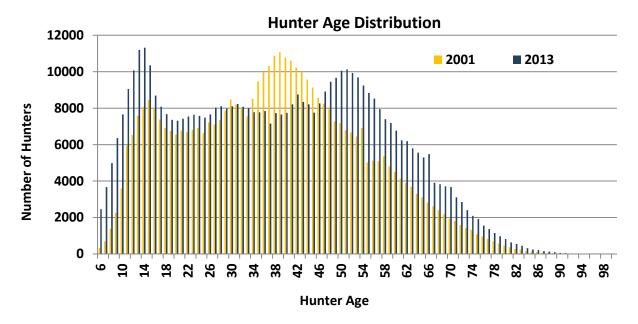


Figure 2. Change in age distribution of Missouri deer hunters from 2001 to 2013. As the "Baby Boomer" generation continues to age, this portion of the hunting population will decrease in hunting participation.

While increasing hunter numbers, greater participation by women, and young hunters is encouraging there is an aging segment of our hunter population that is not being replaced. Twenty-four percent of the hunters in 2001 were 50 years of age or older today that number has increased to 32%, which indicates that unless hunter recruitment increases over the next 5-10 years our total hunter numbers will begin to decline (Figure 2). Additionally, as hunters age they tend to shoot fewer deer (Figure 3). Ultimately, failure to maintain hunter numbers jeopardizes our long-term ability to ensure that deer population remains healthily at or below biological and social carrying capacity.

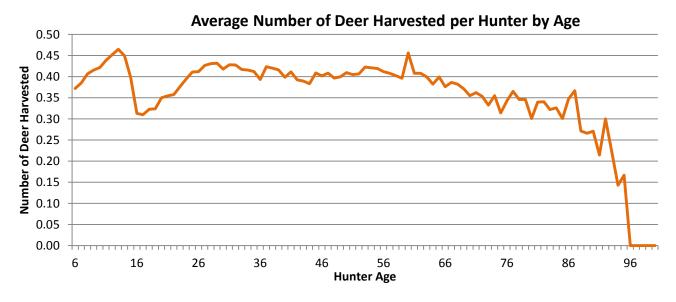


Figure 3. Number of deer harvested per hunter by age in 2013. As deer hunters age they tend to shoot fewer deer.